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City Club of New York

Reconstruction program, 1919

[New York]

[1919?]

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"In the days of political and economic reconstruction which are ahead of us * * * every program, every measure in every program, must be tested by this question, and this question only: Is it just; is it for the benefit of the average man, without influence or privilege; does it embody in real fact the highest conception of social justice and of right dealing without respect of person or class or particular interest?"

—*President Wilson.*

THE CITY CLUB OF NEW YORK

RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

1919

"The Improvement of Economic and Social Conditions—to Aid in Securing Permanent Good Government."

—Extract from Purpose of the Club.

"And we must realize that it is only as we take counsel together, as we ascertain the facts, as in an open-minded manner we seek justice, with a sincere love of justice, that democracy will give us aught of the blessings which we believe that she bears, or that we shall be worthy of this victory which the forces of democracy have achieved."—*Hon. Charles E. Hughes.*

8 March, 1920 - C.R.W.

THE CITY CLUB OF NEW YORK

RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

1919

Among the fundamental purposes of The City Club of New York are "the improvement of economic and social conditions" and "to aid in securing permanent good government." These purposes come particularly to the fore in a period like the present, when society has been lifted out of its accustomed grooves of thought and is earnestly seeking guidance during the period of industrial readjustment following a great war. For some years the Club has had special committees working on various problems upon which the war has shed a new and more revealing light. Every organization interested in good citizenship, if it is to be successful in its efforts, must be increasingly concerned with the problems of general social well being. The wage-earners, if they are to be effective forces for stability and progress in a democracy, must be well paid and housed, well educated, and rendered secure against the uncertainties of modern industrial life. In addition, city, state, and national government, and industry itself, must be developed in the direction of greater efficiency as well as greater responsiveness to the needs of the times. In the furtherance therefore of its announced purposes The City Club of New York, in the utmost spirit of social service, submits the following proposals as its Reconstruction Program.

I. SOCIAL INSURANCE

The principle is now universally accepted that under our modern industrial system there is urgent need for protecting wage-earners against the occurrence of, and against the financial losses due to, the four great hazards which continually beset their lives, namely, accident, sickness, old age disability, and involuntary unemployment. In all the leading countries of the world, including our own, the device of social insurance for meeting this need has to a varying extent been tried and where tried has been universally approved. The time is now ripe in this city and state for the further development and extension of the social insurance device for the greater security and conservation of our wage-earners.

1. Workmen's Compensation

The state of New York in 1913 secured a workmen's compensation law for protection against industrial accident. This statute ranks among the best in the country. Thirty-eight of the states, and the federal government for its million civilian employees, have now adopted similar legislation. Already, in the fourth year of the New York law, the results of its constant financial pressure for "Safety First" are evident in an astonishing decrease in the number of both serious and minor injuries, even at a time when, due to the war, several industrial factors making for higher accident frequency were most marked. Still the number of injuries and deaths in our industries is unduly large. The New York law should be made even more efficacious in relieving the distress due to industrial accidents as well as in preventing them by (1) raising the minimum and maximum weekly amounts of compensation from

$5 and $15 to $8 and $18 respectively; (2) by reducing the period before an injured workman is entitled to benefits from fourteen days to seven; and (3) by increasing the relative importance of the state workmen's compensation insurance fund, thus introducing the greatest possible economy between the cost of compensation to the industries of the state and the amount actually received by injured workmen and their dependents.

2. Workmen's Health Insurance

Legislation for universal workmen's health insurance, to do for sickness what the compensation act has done for industrial accident, was endorsed by the Club in 1917 and again in 1918. In the earlier year "the Club's Committee on Social Insurance cooperated with the State Federation of Labor and other social agencies in the preparation and support of a progressive though very moderate health insurance bill" which, while not enacted at that session, nevertheless, as stated in the Club's annual report for 1918 "laid the foundation for ultimate success." This year the bill has been prepared again for re-introduction. Governor Smith himself is enthusiastic for the measure, having stated in his inaugural address:

> **"Nothing is so devastating in the life of the worker's family as sickness. The incapacity of the wage-earner because of illness is one of the underlying causes of poverty. Now the worker and his family bear this burden alone. The enactment of a health insurance law, which I urge, will remedy this unfair condition. Moreover, it will result in greater precautions being taken to prevent illness and disease, and to eliminate the consequent waste**

to the state therefrom. It will lead to the adoption of wider measures of public health and hygiene, and it will operate to conserve human life."

3. Old Age Retirement Allowance

As a matter of justice to employees who have grown old in the state or city service, no less than as a matter of economy which will permit the maintenance of governmental personnel at high standards of efficiency, a movement is gradually developing for the provision of old age retirement allowances for public employees. The same arguments of equity and economy which apply in connection with public employees are equally weighty in favor of suitable old age provision for the employees of private industry.

4. Unemployment Insurance

Three committees of the Club, those on Employment Exchanges, Industrial Relations, and Social Insurance, have successively recorded their conclusion that for the effective solution of the problem of unemployment there must be included, together with other well approved measures, adequate provision for the insurance of wage-earners against periods of involuntary idleness. We believe that this form of social insurance should be earnestly recommended to the consideration of the special committee of Congress now investigating unemployment problems.

II. PUBLIC WORK TO REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT

There is danger that the closing of war contracts and the demobilization of the military forces may lead to widespread unemployment and suffering among

those who have borne the burden of the struggle to "make the world safe for democracy," unless immediate steps are taken to increase the amount of work available. Any severe crisis of unemployment might also lead to social unrest of a most unfortunate character. The City Club recommends that as an aid in preventing any such depression the State and City of New York take immediate steps to begin as many as possible of the numerous projects of public work postponed on account of the war. Experience has demonstrated that the winter months are by no means an unsuperable obstacle to most work of this nature. The Club further recommends that, as a permanent policy, legislation be enacted requiring the various state departments to confer with the Bureau of Employment of the Industrial Commission before letting contracts for public work, and to place all such contracts, as far as the public convenience will permit, according to the state of the labor market. Besides its value in reducing unemployment, such a policy would tend toward greater economy in public work, as contracts could be secured on favorable terms and a greater choice of labor would be available.

III. PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Through a special committee on Employment Exchanges the City Club some years ago took an active part in the establishment of public employment bureaus by New York State and by the City of New York. Recognizing the problems of interstate regulation and control the Club's committee encouraged the creation by Congress of a federal system to link these public agencies together into one systematic chain, and to organize, wherever necessary, additional bureaus by the authority of the national government.

The war demonstrated the need for such closely related offices and by executive and administrative order a nation-wide public employment service was established. It is believed that this service should be placed upon an adequate permanent basis. The Club therefore recommends that pending the adoption by Congress of necessary appropriation legislation, the City and State of New York should be encouraged to continue to bear their share of the responsibility for providing ample funds for the continuance of this service.

IV. LAND COLONIZATION

The Secretary of the Interior has drafted a bill for introduction in the legislatures of the several states providing for the acquisition and equipment of small farms to be sold to returning soldiers. The plan provides for cooperative action and a sharing of expense by the state and federal governments.

The United States is the only English speaking country which has not passed appropriate legislation for such soldier settlements. The Governor of New York has already expressed himself in favor of a thorough investigation of the plan by the State Commission on Reconstruction Problems. The Club believes that the subject should receive thorough study and if it be found that there are constitutional difficulties in its way in New York, they should be removed.

V. HOUSING

Adequate housing for all classes in the community, including that receiving the lowest wage, is essential to national efficiency, prosperity and well being. The heavy costs of labor turnover, industrial unrest and disorder, and impaired health and efficiency, all of

which affect not only labor but society as a whole, are in no small measure due to the improper housing of the wage earner of limited means. This fact our experience in the war that is now practically over proved conclusively.

Hitherto the commercial builder has not supplied proper houses in sufficient quantity available at low rents, and there is no prospect that such a supply will in the future be forthcoming. Other sources of supply, in comparison with the need, are insignificant. The almost total cessation of commercial building of houses during the war has made this need at this time unusually acute.

The fact that our previous efforts to obtain adequate housing in this country have failed can no longer be ignored; but it may be doubted whether we are agreed upon the remedy. Before the war our public authorities limited themselves to the prevention, in some measure, of the erection of unfit houses; while all the other progressive countries of the world endeavored also to increase the supply of good housing of the type most needed and spent or lent at low rates of interest public moneys to that end. This latter policy our national government adopted as a war measure by building houses, in some cases, for its munition and ship building workers. The question now presents itself: Shall we in this State adopt and extend the same policy as a peace measure? If so, shall it be done by the state or the municipalities? What machinery shall be framed for these novel undertakings? What standards for these houses shall be adopted? How shall they be enforced? Must extra precautions against the erection of commercially unfit houses also be adopted? The safest, and indeed the quickest, way to settle these and many similar questions is for the Governor to

create a sub-committee on housing of his Reconstruction Commission to investigate and report on the matter. In so doing he may well follow the course pursued in the zoning of New York City and appoint on that committee citizens representative of all the varied interests involved.

VI. TAXATION

A problem pressing most urgently in this State at this time is the revision of our system of taxation to meet the present necessities. This is so for two reasons: The demand for increased revenue is immediate and unprecedented because of the new and imperative needs and of the cutting off of former sources of supply; and the conviction is widespread that our present tax laws are, in many particulars if not as a whole, inequitable and unsuited to the task they were enacted to perform.

The present system of taxation is inadequate and discriminatory in that it does not sufficiently reach sources of revenue other than real estate. The general property tax, so called, is in fact a tax only on real estate and certain selected classes of property. We therefore favor the abolition of the present personal property tax, and the substitution for it of a State income tax to reach the income of residents of the State from all sources, and the income of non-residents from sources within the State including income from business carried on in the State. This tax should be extended to corporations, and could probably take the place of some of the special taxes on particular classes of corporation.

Additional sources of revenue might be found in a habitation tax based on rental, which would reach non-residents not engaged in business here but making

New York their dwelling place for a considerable part of the time, and a tax on outdoor advertising, thus still further relieving real estate.

VII. MINIMUM WAGE LEGISLATION

It is estimated that there are over 1,000,000 women workers in New York, the great majority of whom are under thirty years of age. The working conditions of these women are of peculiar concern to the state. They are not, to the same extent as men, in a position to protect themselves through organization. Yet in the words of the United States Supreme Court, **"As healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical wellbeing of women becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the health and vigor of the race."**

New York has long recognized the special position of the woman worker by laws regulating her hours and other working conditions. Great Britain and her colonies, France, twelve American states and the District of Columbia have given additional protection to women workers by authorizing official boards to fix minimum wages. Such legislation has been upheld by the United States Supreme Court and several state courts. The Oregon Supreme Court said, upholding such a law in a test case (Stettler v. O'Hara, 69 Ore., 519, March 17, 1914), **"Every argument put forward to sustain the maximum hours law or upon which it was established applies equally in favor of the minimum wage law as also within the police power of the State and as a regulation tending to guard the public morals and the public health."**

The question of the effects of insufficient wages on women workers is of greater importance in New York, with its large number of women wage-earners, than in

any other State. The City Club recommends that a bureau be established in the Industrial Commission to have charge of the fixing of living wages for women and children. This bureau should be empowered to investigate wage conditions and to appoint representative wage boards composed of representatives of the public and equal numbers of employers and employees in the various low paid trades. Based on the recommendations of the wage boards and the investigations of the bureau, the Commission should have power to fix minimum wages for different occupations sufficient to cover the necessary cost of living. Payment of a normal woman worker at lower rates than such a minimum should then become illegal.

VIII. EDUCATION

As the basis for a sound and intelligent democracy the City Club urges further development of the city public school system, including early erection of additional school buildings, progress in the movement for fuller use of the schools through the work-study-play system, school lunches at cost, and suitable physical training. Classes should be reduced in size to permit of better instruction, salaries for teachers should be raised to a level which will attract and hold capable broad-visioned men and women to the profession, more democracy should be allowed the teaching staffs in determining educational policies, and the teachers' retirement fund should be placed on an equitable and solvent footing. Complementary to pre-vocational and vocational training of school children, the Club strongly recommends cooperation of the state with the federal government to develop institutions for the rehabilitation and vocational re-education of persons crippled by war, industry, or otherwise.

IX. PORT DEVELOPMENT

In view of the urgency of early action for the broad general development of the port of New York and in view of the bringing forward of many conflicting and partial plans put forth for such development by public officials and others, often calling for enormous expenditures of public funds, and the impossibility of bringing those proposals before any authority now constituted which can adequately deal with the matter, the City Club is in favor of the constitution of a port authority for the port of New York with complete control and jurisdiction over all matters relating to the port which now devolves upon the States of New York and New Jersey, and with power to acquire, own and operate such port facilities as may be advisable, including railroad connection and terminals.

The general method presented by the tentative treaty offered by the New York and New Jersey Port and Harbor Development Commission recommends itself as practicable, provided it be promptly accepted by the legislatures of both States. The precise number and constitution of the port authority, in order to afford due representation to the various important interests of the port, is a detail calling for careful consideration.

It is the sense of the City Club that pending the constitution of such port authority the present New York and New Jersey Port Development Commission should proceed uninterruptedly to study the conditions of the port and to develop plans for its relief and improvement and specifically should consider, pass upon, approve with or without modifications, or disapprove plans which are brought forward by public officials for partial solution or amelioration of port conditions,

holding such public meetings upon the same as may be advisable, to the end that measures for prompt alleviation, temporary or permanent, of the more pressing needs may be accomplished, and that suggestions for comprehensive plans for port development may be ready for presentation to the port authority when constituted.

X. DEMOCRATIC SHOP MANAGEMENT

One of the fertile causes of the present widespread industrial unrest appears to be resentment on the part of many laborers at being excluded from participation and responsibility in the management of industry. Efforts of certain thoughtful employers have shown that with increased opportunity for the expression of the men's own individuality and sense of workmanship there comes greater interest and satisfaction, as well as larger and better output. In order that the results of existing experiments in the direction of developing initiative among the workmen may be better known, and any benefits arising therefrom be more widely secured, the City Club takes this opportunity to encourage a State investigation of democratic shop management.

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